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ABSTRACT

The implementation of a developmental kindergarten program designed to address the needs of kindergarten children with learning and behavior problems was resisted by parents. As a result, a practicum was designed for teachers to (1) provide information needed to improve skills necessary for conferences with parents regarding developmental placement programs, and (2) increase understanding that some kinds of school problems can be solved through the successful implementation of developmental programs. Supplemented by posters and informative handouts, intervention consisted of a slide presentation picturing children engaged in various learning activities in a developmental kindergarten classroom and an accompanying cassette-recorded text explaining the cognitive learning benefits of a play-center style of classroom environment and accentuating the positive aspects of developmental theory. The presentation was made to 450 parents, teachers, and other interested viewers at public schools, preschools, day care centers, and teacher in-service meetings in a rapidly growing Florida school district. The goal of the intervention was that 80 percent of teachers and others viewing the slide presentation would demonstrate increased knowledge regarding such classroom activities. The practicum goal was met. The teacher survey, viewer survey, sample photographs, and handout are appended. (Author/RH)

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LEARNING CAN BE CHILD'S PLAY: A DEVELOPMENTAL PRESENTATION FOR PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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Learning Can Be Child's Play: A Developmental Presentation for Parents and Teachers

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by

Rae Hertz

Cluster 17

PS 016539

A Practicum Report Presented to the Ed.D. Program
in Early Childhood
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for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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The Kindergarten Children Pictured and their Parents

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Abstract

Learning Can Be Child's Play: A Developmental Presentation for Parents and Teachers.
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Descriptors: Preschool Education/ Sociodramatic Play/ Primary Education/ Pretend Play/ Developmental Learning/ Early Childhood Education/ Curriculum Development

This practiucm addressed the need of teachers, administrators, and parents for information regarding the cognitive benefits of play for children who are chronologically five years of age but who are developmentally younger as measured by a trained developmental examiner using an instrument such as The Gesell School Readiness Screening Test.

The presentation goals were that 80 percent of teacher viewers and 80 percent of all other viewers of a slide presentation about the cognitive benefits of play for young children in a developmental kindergarten classroom would demonstrate that their knowledge regarding such classroom activities had increased.

The slide presentation was supported with posters, a viewer handout, and a question and answer period.

Of teachers surveyed, 100 percent responded that their questions about developmental kindergarten programs were answered. Of the total number of 450 viewers of the presentation 86 percent responded that their questions were answered. Comments written on the survey forms by parent and teacher viewers were positive and an additional indicator that learning took place. (Appendices include samples of: the first and second teacher's surveys, viewers survey, photos of selected slides, viewer handout, parent photo-use permission letter and the presentation schedule.)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The target area is a school district in a county which ranks 37th in the state in geographical size (738 square miles). It is among the most rapidly growing counties in the state. The county is eighth in size of population (271,781) and has shown a growth in the labor force of 44.5% in the past five years (Division of Economic Development, 1984). This burgeoning rate of growth is expected to continue and projected figures for 1990 show that the population will be nearly doubled in the next five years. John Naisbitt (Megatrends, 1982) reports a 43% rate of population growth for the state partially as a result of a continuing migration to the Sunbelt.

The county is unofficially divided between the Eastern and Western sections with a high concentration of retirees living in the Western portion and a large migrant worker population being part of the population of the Eastern area of the county. With the tremendous growth that the county has experienced, both in population and in economics it is likely that any existing differences between the two areas will soon be blended. The severe weather conditions that have existed in the county in recent years have brought about changes in both economics and employment throughout the area.

The local school board ranks 14th in size of the 67 counties in the state and is the largest single employer in the county with 1,694 teachers currently employed. There are 20 elementary schools and a total of 37 public schools serving a student population of 26,313. Due to the warm winter climate, seasonal employment, and the current need for large numbers of unskilled laborers, there are many transient students within the county.

Of the twenty elementary schools in the county, four were part of a pilot program for developmental kindergarten classes during the 1984-85 school year. This program had been studied and planned for two years prior to the pilot program immplementation (District School Board Publication,1984) and it was planned that after successful evaluation of the pilot program several more elementary schools would participate in the developmental kindergarten program. Extensive training is required for developmental examiners and teaching staff in participating schools and with that training completed, fourteen district schools officially implemented the Developmental Kindergarten Program during the 1985-86 school year.

The author is a member of the staff of one of those schools at which the new placement program was implemented. She is a kindergarten teacher with undergraduate and graduate degrees in early childhood education, has had extensive experience in teaching the learning disabled, is trained

in the administration and evaluation of various assessment instruments (including the Weschler Intelligence Scales), and has received inservice and seminar training in developmental placement theory through both The Gesell Institute of Human Development and the National Institute of Child Development. Current professional responsibilities include being grade-level chairperson and classroom teacher.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

A substantial percentage (fully 30 to 50%) of children who enter kindergarten at age five are developmentally younger, that is; they frequently exhibit behaviors generally recognized as being associated with younger children (Hertz, 1985). Typical age-related behaviors have been well documented by Dr. Arnold Gesell (1977) and others.

In 1979, PREP (Primary Education Program) was mandated by the state of Florida, requiring that each county prepare a plan of pupil progression that would provide expanded diagnostic and treatment services in kindergarten through grade three and would insure that the individual needs of those students were being met. Program guidelines, as provided by the state called for various teaching strategies to be applied in the classroom. Children were tested upon entrance to the school and based on those tests and teacher observations, the children were placed in one of three instructional programs, as follows:

Preventive: for children who have current or potential learning problems.

Developmental: for children who are performing as expected for their age and grade.

Enrichment: for children who show unusual promise or creativity.

When it became evident, early in the implementation of the PREP program, that many more children than expected were being assigned to preventive strategies, a closer look at the preventive program assignments revealed a disturbing pattern of learning and behavior problems. Administrators sought help from the National Institute of Child Development, whose director, Dr. Clyde Gillespie, has been closely associated with the Gesell Institute and has co-authored The Gesell Institute's Child from One to Six with other members of that staff (Ames, Gillespie, Haines, & Ilg, 1979). It was at that time, under the direction of early childhood education supervisor that study and planning began for the eventual pilot program and implementation

of the Developmental Kindergarten Program.

In some schools where the developmental placement program was piloted and in some schools where the program was voluntarily used during the 1984-85 school year, it met with considerable resistance from some parents and teachers. Parental opposition was very vocal, required additional conference time, and ultimately contributed to poor public relations. Teachers, principals, and primary specialists reported the necessity for parent conferences well in excess of the usual requirements. In addition, some kindergarten children were under stress as the conflict over their educational placement was played out between the home and the school. Resistance by teachers, although admittedly somewhat more subtle, was still a source of stress for those particular teachers.

Since the Developmental Kindergarten Program was scheduled to be fully implemented in a total of 14 schools in the county during the 1985-86 school year, additional parent and/or teacher resistance was anticipated.

Developmental placement theory is based on years of research and hundreds of observations of child behaviors. Much of that observation has shown that children learn extremely well through play (Gillespie & Gillespie, 1983) and yet much of the opposition to developmental kindergarten programs is that children should be in school to learn - not to play.

Successful implementation of the Developmental Kindergarten-Program could result in:

*A greater number of accurate referrals to special programs. *A reduction in classroom behavior problems. *Fewer children with emotional or psychosomatic physical problems. *A lower drop-out rate in the upper grades. *More successful, happy children in the primary grades.

Briefly stated, the successful implementation of the Developmental Kindergarten Program could be achieved if parents and teachers were helped to understand that learning can take place for children through play, and that there are many possible benefits to be gained through such a program.

A parent survey sent out by one of the schools where the developmental placement program was used during the 1984-85 school year supports the need for additional information and communication about the program.

Survey Question:

"Do you feel you know enough about the school programs such as: reading, guidance, music, etc.?"

Survey Answers:

92% NO

8% YES.

The county supervisor of early childhood education, during a personal interview, expressed agreement that parents (especially) and some teachers would benefit from a greater understanding of developmental theory. Any technique, process, or application of knowledge that would ease the implementation of the Developmental Kindergarten Program for all concerned would be of value to parents, teachers, and administrators.

A teacher survey (see Appendix A) was distributed to kindergarten and first grade teachers in each of the 14 targeted schools with the assistance of the primary specialist in each building. Of 110 surveys which were sent out, 75 responses were received (a 67% rate of return). When asked if they felt secure in their knowledge of developmental placement theory the teachers' answers were almost evenly divided (37,"yes"; 34,"no"; 4, "no opinion"). The question: "Would you benefit from a presentation describing the positive aspects of the developmental placement program?" received 75 "yes" answers. In answer to "Would parents benefit from such a program?" there were 74 affirmative responses and one of "no opinion". When asked if they thought that the developmental placement program would correct <u>some</u> aspects of school failure 66 responded "yes", 3 responded "no", and 6 responded "no opinion". The final question, "Would a presentation about developmental placement theory help to successfully implement such a program?", received 74 "yes" answers and one "no opinion".

In pursuit of the underlying causes for resistance to an educational program it might first be beneficial to examine the reasons for using it. "Learning can be child's play!" is a process well documented by Segal & Adcock (1981), "Children learn a great deal through observation, but they learn even more by actively participating".

There are <u>theories of play</u>:

(Williams & Beeson, 1982):

Arousal-seeking: humans need to be aroused by surrounding stimuli.

Learning: children learn to play by causing an increase in pleasant experiences.

Developmental: stages of play may be linked to the developmental stages of the intellect.

There are <u>kinds of play</u>:

(Gesell,Ilg, and Ames, 1977):

Solitary: alone

Parellel: alone, but alongside others

Cooperative: social play, truly with others

There are <u>values of play</u>:

(Williams & Beeson, 1982):

Children learn to:

identify

generalize

classify

order

reason

perceive relationships

solve problems

think divergently

develop language

release emotions

experiment

There are <u>levels of play</u>:

(Smilansky, 1968, quoted by Williams & Beeson, 1982):

Functional Play: muscle movements, repetitive action

Constructive Play: building or creating

Dramatic Play: substitution of imagery

Ruled Play: acceptance and adjustment to rules

Play involves (Brown,1974):

testing exploring

experimenting absorbing

self-direction self-confidence

mastery of materials

physical development

language development

helping children relate to others

helping teachers better understand children

helping children understand their world.

Reading and play are highly related. Schickendanz (1977) suggests using symbolic props during play with proper labels and signs attached. Language experience stories also help to establish the connection between reading and dramatic, symbolic play. She warns that "props should be viewed as possibilities, not as prescribed lessons". The element of free choice is imperative in the true play situation.

With the many documented learning benefits of children's play well educated judgement would dictate provision for children to learn in the best way for them. The benefits of play are also closely related with the sequences of stages in the development of young children.

Dr. Arnold Gesell and staff have produced, over a 40 year period, material which describes the theory of developmental age (Ciuretta, 1971). Observations were recorded (on film) of the behaviors of hundreds of children over the years. The Gesell Developmental Examination was derived from normative data established by those observations. Although the Gesell Examinations have not been standardized, in statistical terms, Arthur Jensen (1980) suggests that between kindergarten and 4th grade the figure copying scores correlate highly with other I.Q. measures and therefore would qualify as a valid measure of intelligence. However, measuring of intelligence was never a goal during the long process of establishing the Gesell Developmental Examination.

Reasons for using a developmental placement program (Gauvin, 1983) include:

The evaluation of the developmental level of incoming primary children.

To aid the parents, principal, primary specialist, and teachers to arrive at the placement which meets the individual needs of the children.

To assist all concerned in achieving realistic objectives for children.

Various combinations of the age-stage theory have been offered by both psychologists and educators. Gesell has refined the age-stage characteristics, as noted by his years of observations, into specific categories of traits (school life, interpersonal relations, fears) for each age level. From his observations and refinements, Gesell and his staff eventually developed The Gesell Developmental Examination. The test includes the following subtests:

Cube Test: Measures eye-hand coordination, motor skills, and attention span.

Interview Questions: Reveals clarity of speech and accuracy of information.

Pencil and Paper Tests: Assesses visual perception, eye-hand coordination, and general level of maturity.

Incomplete Man: Perceptual functioning.

Animals and Interests: Verbal abilities, organization of thinking, and capacity to attend to a task. (District School Board of Pasco County, 1984).

In an evaluation of 29 different early childhood assessment instruments Schmidt (1981)

characterizes the Gesell instrument in this way:

Response Mode: Verbal

Reference: Normative

Emphasis: Screening

Content: Auditory reception, social development, language development, visual reception, motor development, and school readiness.

As the theory of developmental placement is put into action throughout the country (999 schools in 38 states are currently placing children according to developmental age), the controversy over common groupings continues (Gesell Institute of Human Development, Directory, 1985). The two basic age groupings are homogeneous (all of one age), and heterogeneous (the ages of the children are mixed). The decision on whether to age-group homogeneously or heterogeneously depends on the goals of the program, the client population, the resources of the plant (are there enough different rooms to house the groups?), and the choice of the administration based on their research (Freedman, 1981). Some parents have objected to homogeneous

grouping suggesting that their children have reverted to some "baby behaviors", including thumbsucking and the need for afternoon naps. Clyde Gillespie points out that these symptoms are indeed signs of overplacement, "When children are in trouble, they reach back to younger behaviors" (Gillespie & Gillespie, 1983). Other signs of overplacement that are often seen by parents and teachers as listed by Bohl (1984) are:

Frequent crying	Refusing to try
Short attention span	Often alone
Continous colds	Chronic illnesses
Refusing to talk	Hiding face or eyes
Being badly behaved	Daydreaming
Not finishing work	Hitting others

Not waiting his or her turn

Being overanxious about being right

Exhibiting quixotic mood changes

Frequently acting in a desperate way

Being a follower

Resisting preparation for school.

When the child is continuously pressured, as when overplaced, the child will withdraw and valuable avenues of learning will be closed (Bohl, 1984).

The reasons for placing children in programs for which they are developmentally unprepared are varied and often subliminal. In our ongoing efforts to compete, our society, led by many parents and some teachers, continues to express the anxieties of competition through young children (LeShan, 1984). Teaching children skills when they are not ready developmentally is a waste of time at best and possibily eventually harmful to the child at worst. The following description, by LeShan, of an inappropriate learning task will demonstrate:

> "You can easily teach a two-year-old to tie her own shoelaces. Give her a lesson every morning, seven days a week, for about two weeks, and she will learn. Her skill may even survive for a day or two, but by the time the lessons are over, that kid is likely to be pretty sore about the whole experience and may decide that learning is a battle between an adult and a child and not the best possible fun."

Early enrichment programs which stress academic skills are very controversial. Several studies have shown that most children gain from quality pre-school programs, but not from those in which materials and experiences are too advanced (Thornton, 1984). Thornton quotes David Elkind of Tufts University:

"A child may experience failure and lose self-esteem, not because he is unable to do something, but because he is presented with inappropriate material."

The rush to place children in academic programs - much against their developmental will - is discussed by David Elkind, author of The Hurried Child, (1982). Another example of the many pressures that adults place on children to grow up fast is that of academic achievement. Adults seem to have little acceptance for the child whose internal time-clock may cause him to be a "late bloomer". Many parents refuse to allow retention in kindergarten for the developmentally younger child, while almost all parents who have allowed their child to be retained, have been satisfied with the results.

Kindergarten entrance for a child can be a very difficult time for parents and an extra measure of understanding by teachers and administrators would aid acceptance of new educational programs. It may also be their first connection with formal education in years. Some parents may be uncomfortable with the new relationships their child will be forming outside the home and may feel in competition with school personnel for the child's feelings of love and/or respect. The role of the child within the home (Martin-Huff, 1984) may change dramatically when the child begins school, causing additional parental stress. The results of a study by Martin-Huff (1984) as to relationships between parent attitudes and child adjustment to kindergarten indicate that while there are many familial stresses connected with the entrance of a child into school - it is also a time of positive attitudes about education by both parents and therefore an excellent time to establish ongoing relationships with those parents.

At the time during which an initial assessment is done (developmental or otherwise) parent attitudes can be greatly influenced. The person doing the assessment may influence parents regarding all professionals who deal with the child. The responsibility of that first person to make contact and to imbue parents with positive attitudes and is a great one. Hansen (1983) identified some parent needs as related to assessment of their children. The most frequent response to parent interviews was the request for more information although parents often felt that they did not know just what to ask (this might indicate the need for more parent education about the assessment). Parents were also concerned about the training and experience of the evaluator and they felt they would like the results on the same day as the testing. The parents interviewed for Hansen's research also wished for "hope and reassurance" about their child.

Parental anxiety is natural when children begin school (Persky & Golubchick, 1978) for parents are admittedly giving up control of the child to the school. The young child is quick to

perceive this tension of parents (usually mothers more than fathers). When family discord over the child's placement is added to the typical separation stress for both parent and child the situation can become drastic. It is, therefore, imperative that developmental placement programs be explained to parents as early as possible and that it be done in a sensitive and caring manner.

Many parents are of the opinion that early motor development equates with high intellect (Hedges, 1976). Early walking, crawling, or talking means to many parents the their child is "very bright" and therefore should be ready to enter school when the chronological age indicates. It is quite possible that they will continue to maintain higher expectations than called for throughout that child's educational career. Actually, there is poor correlation between early motor development and intelligence quotient.

One of the most important reasons to consider retaining an immature child is to prevent first

grade reading failure. The immature child will not be able to cope, will not meet with success in reading (or with parental and teacher expectations) and as a result will develop negative attitudes about reading and about school that may never be overcome.

While parents are sincerely concerned about the education of their children, they often have misconceptions about the goals of kindergarten programs and this is frequently seen in the kinds of questions they ask (Simmons & Brewer, 1985). Parents want to know:

Why children in kindergarten have to be so noisy

When children will learn to read

Why can't the children all write the alphabet?

Why can't they count to one hundred?

Why can't they sit still in the classroom?

The answers to all of these questions must in some way deal with developmental theory and how children are expected to behave at a given period of time: Simmons & Brewer (1985) offer these answers:

Children are noisy since one of the best ways to expand language is to use it in talking with others.

Children will learn to read when a number of factors coincide, such as; the prerequisite language experiences occur, the children have a sufficient set of backround experiences, and the internal developmental time clock is right for that learning to occur.

The children in a kindergarten class will not all be able to write the alphabet - yet. Fine motor skills must be adaquately developed along with the knowledge of position words and directionality. Many children can count to the higher numbers, but that is not the same as truly understanding the value of a number (Simmons & Brewer, 1985).

Asking children to do things that they are not developmentally capable of does not give them appropriate challenges (Cherry, 1985). It can be discouraging, create deflated self-images, and eventually show up as poor patterns of response when the child is finally ready for the task. Placing children in kindergarten or primary school, only to discover that they are not quite as mature as the other children in the class, can lead to stress and misbehavior at home and in school.

School systems have frequently suffered from problems of communication with parents. Communications problems may be a contributing factor in the difficulty of explaining developmental placement to parents, and in their acceptance of it. The factors that effect parent-school communications are to a great extent individual, depending upon school district policy, the nature of the general population served by the school, and the qualities of the communications skills of the teachers and administrators.

A recent study of items affecting school and parent communications included age, occupation, race, and level of education (Wilson, Pentecoste, & Nelms, 1984). In this study younger parents were generally more satisfied with the level of communication with the teachers, but most of the respondents felt the upper echelon (principals and above) were not sensitive to their problems

Unfortunately, too many teachers are too willing to pass out pencils and papers (some children go home with 10 or more worksheets everyday). It is an ingrained way of

functioning for many teachers who consider it "readiness" for first grade. Unless it is truly spontaneous and of purely internal interest, children should not be taught reading or other academic instruction in kindergarten or early first grade (Ilg, Ames, Haines & Gillespie, 1978).

A parent's letter (Gerritz, 1983) to her child's teacher offers some suggestions for improving parent-school communications:

When scheduling a conference, notify the parent of what will be discussed and ask if the parent has any particular concerns.

At meeting time - go over again what will be talked about and what won't be discussed.

Parents really want to know how the child is doing compared to his own capability.

If there are problems, state the plan of action and the expected results.

And finally, plan some time to listen...really listen to the parent.

Many parents have sucessfully accepted the developmental placement of a child (or children) and are now outspoken advocates of the program (Ames, 1966). There are parents, teachers, and

administrators on both sides of the developmental fence and Ames suggests that one meet continued resistance with knowledge and patience.

Sputnik, in the 1960's, rushed the American people into the space race - and the race with time. The war on poverty was being fought too, and early childhood education captured a place on the front lines with the beginning of Head Start. Long term studies of Head Start programs have shown a connection between the early learning experience and eventual graduation from high school (Seefeldt, 1985). The impressive gains achieved with Head Start and programs like it, which were aimed mainly at socio-economically deprived children, do not translate into like success for middle class children and to quote Nicholas Anastasiow: "We don't know about the rich, the rich don't let us study them."

Preprimary education experienced a considerable amount of growth in the period from 1970 to 1982. (The Condition of Education, 1984).

A 27% increase in preprimary students occurred in that period despite an 8% decline in the 3-to-5 year old population over the same period. An increase of another 28% in preprimary school enrollment is projected by 1992. For both public and private schools, the greatest increases are expected in the 3-to-4 year old age group as 5 year old enrollment is now nearing 100%. Employment of mothers with preschoolers and a continuing recognition of the effect of early education on lifelong learning both contribute to these preprimary enrollment trends. Still another boost to these numbers is the increase in children of prepriamry age which began in 1980. The progress that is established now in maturational placement will be imperative when educators face overwhelming numbers of primary children in the not so distant future.

A review of the current literature regarding the development of young children and their readiness for school may provide some insight into the problem of overcoming resistance to a developmental placement program.

Gesell describes the life of the young child in terms of cycles (Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1977). The cycles are visualized in the form of a spiral as the trends of development tend to repeat themselves. As the child matures she passes through various stages of equilibrium (a period of stability within the age) and disequilibrium (a period of growth within the age noted by more or less dramatic changes in behavior). These stages occur approximately every six months from twenty-four months to seventy-two months. Recognition of these important age-stage changes in young children would help parents and teachers to provide the understanding and environment necessary to nurture development and growth.

The option of retention in kindergarten, as a way to give a child more time to mature developmentally, is a difficult choice for teachers to make as well as parents. Mildren Curry (Early Years, 1983) provides an understanding glimpse into feelings that are common among parents who hear that their child is to be retained. She lists many of the symptoms of overplacement and discusses how parents can begin to perceive retention as a

positive fact in their child's life. Curry notes that parents have a hard time recognizing immaturity in their own child and that it is often difficult for them to separate intelligence from maturity.

In their study, "Predicting School Readiness: The Validity of Developmental Age", Wood, Powell, and Knight, (Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1984) discuss the need for a more definite explanation of what readiness is. Their study supports developmental theory as provided by the Gesell Institute and they cite a strong parent/teacher education program within the school district where the study took place as being a necessary part of the success of the program in that area.

Gentile and Hoot (1983) attempt to relieve some parent and teacher anxiety about early development of reading skills by pointing out the critical relationship that exists between kindergarten play activities and the ability to learn to read. They go on to suggest that pushing children into academic processes for which they are not prepared may actually be a hindrance to the

maturational process and that learning to read is only one facet of a child's development.

Jean Piaget's theories affect much of what we decide about children's programs (Felton, 1976) and he has shown through his studies that children process information differently from adults. In the hurry to have children grow up, many times adult attitudes are applied to children's thinking. Piaget explained that mental development progresses through definite stages and that these stages occur in a fixed sequence. The sequence is the same for all children although some may move from one stage to another sooner or later than others. Gesell has held to the same theory and has also shown it to be so, possibly with a more sound research base than Piaget, who used only his own children, while Gesell observed, filmed, and photographed hundreds of children.

The self directed interests of children in play help them to learn to deal with problems in their social world according to Millie Almy. Other distinctive features of play are stated in her article, "A Child's Right to Play" (1984).

Children become more flexible in their thinking as they experiment with problem solving possibilities. The symbolic experiences that children go through in play situations sets the stage for later skills in reasoning and abstract symbols (reading).

A framework of research was established to prepare a handbook for the Vermont State Department of Education (Lengel, 1982). Statement of the framework base attests to the fact that children develop in systematic but individual ways. Schools are recognized as an important environment to children and as a force which provides both expectations of and interactions with youngsters. Other environments affect children (home, church) and the continuity of various environments is most important to childhood adjustment and success. How a child meshes with the expectations of it's environment and it's developmental status are important factors in the way the child adapts to and uses the available opportunities in any new setting.

Lengel cites two major findings from his research: Early screening is effective in preventing deficits from becoming major

problems and it concommitantly reduces the stress of identified major problems. And secondly, when children, identified through prescreening as not being ready for particular educational programs, are still placed in those programs, the results are most often negative and include lower long term school achievement, greater reading problems, high rates of absenteeism, and general dissatisfaction with school.

In his work, The Hidden Handicap (1980), Kranes speaks of Gesell:

"...(he) was able to evolve what proved to be an invaluable frame of reference based on maturity profiles and stages of growth; his studies revealed that in the process of development each child is born not only with a potential that is uniquely his, but, also that there are basic trends and growth sequences which are typical for all children."

Some educator-researchers have contended for years (Moore & Moore, 1972) that early schooling can do much more harm than good. These writers cite several studies that show that children who entered school at a younger age (some at 4yrs.,9mos.)

did not fare as well over time as their older (5yrs, 7mos. and up) counterparts. Moore and Moore also discuss possible injury to delicate visual, auditory, and neurological systems from consistent efforts to operate beyond the limits of developmental accomplishment.

In an effort to enhance the current levels of developmental maturity (not rush it) in children entering kindergarten, a program of teaching interactive play techniques was carried out (Hertz, 1985). Within the constraints of expected county guidelines children were shown how to play, given some starting points, and were allowed two extended periods of free choice play each school day. The success of the program was evident in parent and teacher observations, but more importantly, was shown in the smiling faces of comfortable children.

"The 5's and 6's 'Go to School, Revisited (Webster, 1984) is a retrospective of Emma Sheehy's book (1954) in which Sheey stated that early childhood programs should be built around the needs of the children; the classroom should be a place

where the child's interests can be developed and where natural growth can occur. Thirty years later Webster laments what she perceives as the loss of Sheey's principles in the increasingly "first grade" atmosphere of today's kindergarten curriculum.

The Gesell Institute of Human Development (1980) defines school readiness as "the ability to cope with the school environment physically, socially, and emotionally, as well as academically, without undue stress."

School readiness is the topic of a chapter by Baron & Baron (1983) entitled, "When Should Your Child Start Kindergarten?". They point out that when children enter kindergarten is a time when parents can really affect their child's future success in school. Mentioning the wide variety of required ages of entry to schools throughout the country, they remind parents that there is no "right" age to begin kindergarten and that age can't guarentee readiness for school. They advise getting affirmative answers to several questions about the child's developmental status first.

A study by Obrzut, Nelson, and Obrzut (1984) proposed to examine the success of early school entrants and to define some of the variables affecting school success. Results showed that although the early entrants were ahead of the regular aged entrants in academic areas, the differences between the two groups on a behavior rating scale completed by teachers was insignificant. Also, 28% of the early admitted group was retained and only 2% of the non-early admitted group remained in kindergarten another year.

The need for day long child care due to economics is discussed by Price (1984) as another example of the pressures placed on young chidren. Some of the other pressures are to get good grades and to complete highly academic curriculums. Five year olds have been shown in many studies to be very receptive learners; this information has been applied by some educators to mean more workbooks, reading books, and dittoes. Most 5 year old children, even the developmentally mature ones cannot sit in a chair for hours and do papers.

Child development specialists see this academic paper pushing as a disservice to youngsters who not only need play to learn but who also need free choice within the classroom framework to help develop necessary social skills. The overpressured, academically alienated child will try, meet with failure, possibly try again, and then will back down to a position of acceptance of him or herself as incompetent.

In the past budget problems have limited the task of examining every child entering school for readiness, thus one reason for age related cut-off dates for kindergarten and first grade entrance (Kalk, 1982). There is a wide range (up to five months) between acceptable ages of entry into school in various school districts around the country. When translated into percentages of a youngster's total life span, the age differences between the oldest and youngest entrants can be quite large. Studies by Hedges (1977) and others have shown that throughout elementary school the youngest entrants receive lower grades, are rejected more often by peers, and have more negative attitudes toward school.

A Fordham University study by the Graduate School of Education (1978) points out that usually children don't need to be taught how to engage in imaginative verbal play, but that when verbal creative efforts are not reinforced, confidence and finally desire to continue creative efforts will be lost. Situations in which creative expression can be supported and directed toward academic concepts will continue the development of verbal expression.

While many career women who have become mothers are opting to stay home with their children (Williams and others, 1984) child development specialists are suggesting that day care should still be used part of the time for the good of the child. One mother expresses that her two older children, who were in day care, are more outgoing and independent than her younger two who were raised entirely at home.

Advocates of day care insist that children are better off (educationally and socially) than they would be if they were kept at home (Watson and Others, 1984). Carollee Howes (Assistant Professor of Education, UCLA) observes that children in

quality day care develop better social skills, form friendships, and are generally more cooperative than children with no day care attendance. Research is beginning to show that children in good day care establishments do have certain advantages. They tend to deal with everyone better, they are more comfortable in groups, and they are better able to adapt to elementary school.

In a sidebar to a recent Newsweek cover story (Five Steps to Good Day Care, 1984) Russell Watson discusses some components of good child care:

* A stable staff: who should be trained in child development.
* Small groups: The size of the group should depend on the age of the child and the levels of development reached.
* The right kind of attention: appropriate day care must be judged by what is important for the child's development.
* The right activities: Watson quotes Chief of Child Development at Children's Hospital of Boston, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton: "Early learning is not where it's at...children have too many things to learn about themselves first."

* A role for parents: many day care centers now hold workshops for parents to provide them with child development information.

Parental attitudes toward learning and school behaviors of their children can have a powerful effect on the process of communication between parents and schools (Klein and others, 1981). Some parents are generally dissatisfied with the school and/or the teacher, thus placing blame on others and avoiding the issue of their own responsibility and the necessity of confronting their child with the responsibility for behavior and learning. Some parents feel that constant pressure must be applied to cause the child to perform to the level of their expectations. The unstated goal may be percieved as the reduction of their own anxiety and the fulfillment of their own unmet needs for achievement. They are really projecting the unmet needs onto the child who becomes caught in the ensuing home-school conflict. Adjustment of dysfunctional parental attitudes can help the child receive a consistent message of parental expectations and can help the

school to better accomplish its primary goal which is fulfillment of the various educational needs of the child.

"Hopefully, the time will come when a child can proceed through school at his own pace, inspired and motivated by the teachers, the curriculum and himself, and not motivated by competition with others or artificial grade-level expectations.", (Wendt, Schramm, & Schmaltz, 1977).

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

This presentation proposed to provide teachers with needed information to improve their conferencing skills with parents regarding developmental placement programs and to help teachers to understand that some kinds of school problems can be solved through the successful implmentation of such programs. Teachers would begin to understand, by viewing the presentation themselves, that it would help parents to appreciate the value of the placement program.

Parents were to be able to benefit from the presentation by receiving accurate and current information about what actually happens in a developmental kindergarten classroom. The presentation was to provide answers to many questions that parents had regarding developmental testing and placement.

The previously mentioned objectives were to be measured in a number of ways. Teachers were to complete Teacher Survey - II (see Appendix B) immediately after viewing the presentation with an anticipated outcome that 80% of those surveyed would answer "Yes" to at least 80% of the items. Teachers who attended the presentation were to be provided a return envelope and were asked to share brief notes on how they used the information.

All other viewers of the presentation including public school parents and parents, teachers, and administrators of preschool and daycare centers were to be given the Viewer Survey (see Appendix C). The anticipated outcome was that at least 80% of those viewers surveyed would answer "Yes" to at least 80% of the items.

Analyses of the data were to include graphs to illustrate the breakdown of the primary target audiences, evaluation of the responses on each survey and a summary and discussion of comments provided by teachers, parents, and administrators.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Pushing a child ahead, beyond her individual developmental limits often causes harm due to the symptoms of excess stress, but waiting the extra year will do no harm (Carll & Richard, 1972). In their fine work, One Piece of the Puzzle, Carll and Richard discuss every aspect of developmental placement in terms that are easy to understand. Unfortunately, this book has not been well read by parents. The length of the work (125 pages) and the cost (about $6.00) are both factors preventing its consumption by parental audiences.

Louise Bates Ames has authored a book for parents and teachers through The Gesell Institute. It is called Is Your Child in the Wrong Grade? (1966). As with the work by Carll and Richard, this provides an excellent description of the developmental needs and characteristics of children, but since it is also long (151 pages) and somewhat expensive ($9.95), it is even less likely

to be read by busy parents.

Through their distributor, Programs for Education, Inc., The Gesell Institute offers films, video tapes, books, and a cassette tape. The cassette tape provides the developmental information although by itself it does not seem to convince parents that such a program as developmental placement could be valuable for their children.

Using comments expressed by parents whose children have been placed in developmental kindergarten classrooms Hood and others (1982) prepared a parent's guide to developmental placement which, though explanatory, is very specific to a particular location.

In a study to improve parent communications Goodall (1983) established a series of home visits, visiting 39 homes of incoming kindergarten children in the two weeks before school began. That method of communicating to parents would be chronologically impossible locally since nearly 50% of incoming kindergarten students are not registered when school begins, and geographically unsound, due to excess distances to be traveled.

Other possible solutions to the problem of suitably describing the developmental placement program to parents and teachers would be to:

Send home letters and bulletins to parents explaining the developmental placement program. (This has been done and has not been proven successful in the past.)

Provide voluntary inservice programs for teachers to explain the developemental placement theory. (This has been done in the past, and while the inservice was very effective, it only reached an audience of teachers who chose to be there - not necessarily those who will be dealing with the developmental program and parents of children in the develpmental program.)

Discuss with parents, on an individual basis, the reasons for the required developmental placement of their children.

(This has resulted in expressions of dissatisfaction from both parents and teachers.)

A slide presentation picturing children engaged in various learning activities a developmental kindergarten classroom was chosen as the solution strategy to the problem described earier and was prepared for viewing by various interested groups of parents and teachers. The cassette recorded text explained the cognitive learning benefits of a play-center style of classroom environment and accentuated the positive aspects of developmental theory (see Appendix D for Sample Photos).

In addition, several large posters were used showing behavior characteristics of children in different developmental age groups and showing self-portraits drawn by children in the different developmental stages. A question and answer period followed each presentation. Copies of a hand-out entitled "Answers to Some Questions" was provided for all viewers (see Appendix E for Viewer Handout).

The presentation was made to parents, teachers, and other interested viewers at some public schools during open house meetings or at other available meeting times. Presentations to preschools, daycare centers and teacher inservices

were arranged through the local preschool owners association or were provided on an individual basis (see Appendix G for presentation schedule).

The slide presentation of developmental kindergarten activities and developmental theory, "Learning Can Be Child's Play", along with supportive materials (posters and an informative handout) was successful in assisting the implementation of the developmental kindergarten program in the target school district. Using a colorful, interesting approach and providing needed information which has been compiled from a solid research base has helped to assure that success.

The tone of the presentation was general, that is; not specific to a school or geographic area so that the program may be applicable in a variety of settings (including public school groups or private day care establishments) and in a variety of locations.

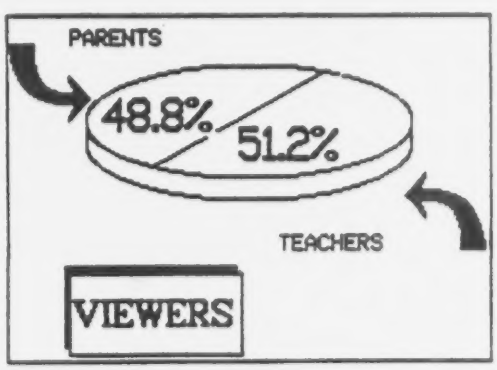
CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the teachers and administrators who viewed the presentation of slides and supportive materials, "Learning Can be Child's Play" (see box below) 22% wrote about their use of the information in the classroom and in conferencing with parents regarding the proposed developmental placement of children. Some sample remarks are:

"When I used your material during a conference for referral to developmental placement it was most convincing!"

"The information you gave us was relayed to four additional teachers on our staff."



"Thank you for bringing your most interesting and

informative presentation to our school. We're sure it helped many parents to begin to understand the developmental program." (Teacher)

"I believe your presentation helped parents and teachers to understand our program better." (Primary Specialist)

"Everyone I have talked to (parents & staff) appreciated the prompt way in which you provided your expertise. It was very rewarding to have the use of such valuable information." (Public School Principal)

The teacher surveys which were collected prior to and following the presentation (see boxes below) demonstrated that a need existed for more knowledge of developmental theory (Teacher Survey - I) and

TEACHER SURVEY-1
110 SENT
75 COLLECTED
(67% RESPONSED)

	YES	NO	NO OPINION
1.	37	34	4
2.	75	—	—
3.	74	—	1
4.	68	3	6
5.	74	—	1

TEACHER SURVEY-2
41 COLLECTED
FROM VIEWERS
OF PRESENTATION

	YES	NO	NO OPINION
1.	41	—	—
2.	41	—	—
3.	41	—	—
4.	41	—	—
5.	41	—	—

(100 %)

that the need was met when 100% of respondents who had completed both surveys indicated the following:

** that they feel more secure in their knowledge of developmental theory

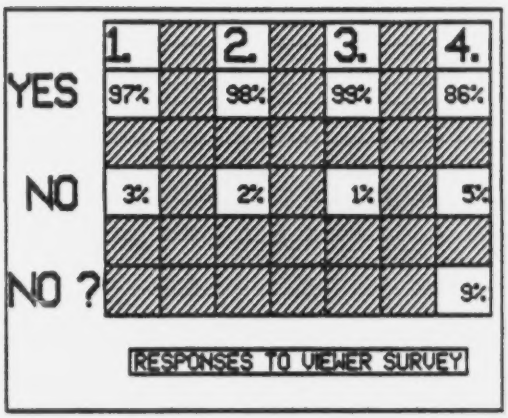
** that they have been able to benefit from the presentation

** that they think parents were able to benefit from the presentation

** that they view the successful implementation of developmental placement programs as a solution to selected school problems (see Appendix B for Teacher Survey - II)

** that they feel the presentation was a help in implementing the developmental placement program in their school.

The anticipated outcome with regard to teachers was surpassed. The continued influence on developmental placement programs and on the school community at large by teachers who are knowledgable and confident will be demonstrated repeatedly in the future.



Analysis of responses from a total of 450 viewers surveyed (48.8% of which were parents) after the presentation shows that goals were also met regarding parent viewers. Better than 80% of viewers (86% to 99%) answered "yes" to all of the items on the survey. Many parents wrote positive remarks on the survey sheet including the following:

** "Excellent slide presentation...extremely informative to hear directly from a teacher about the different levels."

** "Great, I feel much better about the new program now!"

** "I learned much from the pre-film presentation."

** "Very professionally presented...these developmental kindergarten programs are great!"

** "All of my questions were answered...excellent content."

During the fulfillment of the objectives of this project a need was determined (for information about what takes place in a developmentally oriented classroom) and the need was met as shown by the results of the surveys which were collected. Additional needs were recognized during the first two presentations when many questions were posed regarding specifics of developmental levels, how individual placement decisions were made, and how the program was being carried out by county level administrators. These additional needs were also met by answering specific questions and by the use of several posters which showed the characteristics of children at the developmental ages of four, four and one half, five, and five and one half. Other posters showed self-portraits drawn by children at various developmental levels.

Many teachers wrote about how they were using actual teaching ideas that they had observed during the slide presentation indicating that a need was fulfilled for activities to use with the children in the developmental kindergarten classrooms.

On two occasions presentations were made, by invitation, from a different school district during teacher inservice days as part of their preparations for district-wide implementation of a development placement program suggesting the need for duplication of a program such as this one in many other school districts. Following are several recommendations for successful replication of this project:

1. Establish the information needs for a particular school or school district by circulating surveys or questionnaires such as those shown in Appendices A and B.

2. Use a multi-media approach to parent meetings. A locally produced program is very effective in describing to parents (and others) that "this is how we are doing it in <u>our</u> district." Large posters which show the local approach to the various developmental levels will be helpful. Prepare more than one copy of each and display them in different parts of the room, especially when presenting to larger groups.

3. According to the findings of local information needs it could also be very helpful to show one of the films or videos which have been produced by The Gesell Institute. (Information about the Gesell materials is available by writing to Programs for Education,Inc., Dept. W83, 82 Park Avenue, Flemington, NJ 08822).

The district office of early childhood education will be provided with a copy of this report to be used as needed in the continuing implementation of the developmental placement program at the local level. A copy of the slide presentation and the companion text on cassette will be made available to the district media center for use by all of the elementary schools. In addition, this report will be forwarded to The Gesell Institute of Human Development in New Haven, Connecticut to be included in their compilation titled Collected Success: A Developmental Placement Notebook.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TEACHER SURVEY - I

TEACHER SURVEY - I

1. Do you feel secure enough in your knowledge of developmental placement theory to be able to conference with parents whose children are involved?

YES NO NO OPINION

2. If your school were to implement a developmental placement program (based on the developmental ages acquired from administration of The Gesell School Readiness Screening Test) would you benefit from a locally produced presentation describing the positive aspects of such a program?

YES NO NO OPINION

3. Would parents, whose children would be involved, benefit from such a presentation?

YES NO NO OPINION

4. Do you view the successful implementation of developmental placement programs in schools as a solution to some aspects of school failures (behavior, inaccurate placement in support programs)?

YES NO NO OPINION

5. Would a quality presentation about developmental placement theory help you to successfully implement such a program in your school?

YES NO NO OPINION

APPENDIX B

TEACHER SURVEY - II

1. Do you feel secure enough in your knowledge of developmental placement theory to be able to conference with parents whose children are involved?

YES NO NO OPINION

2. Since your school has implemented the developmental placement program, have you viewed a locally produced presentation describing the positive aspects of such a program and did you benefit from the presentation?

YES NO DID NOT SEE IT

3. Do you think that parents from your school, who saw the presentation, were able to benefit from it?

YES NO NO OPINION

4. Do you view the successful implementation of developmental placement programs in schools as a solution to some kinds of school problems (negative behaviors, inaccurate placement in support programs)?

YES NO NO OPINION

5. Do you feel that the audio-visual presentation about developmental placement theory was a help in implementing such a program in your school?

YES NO NO OPINION

APPENDIX C

VIEWER SURVEY

"Learning Can Be Child's Play": A Developmental Presentation for Parents and Teachers.

1. Do you feel the presentation was interesting and informative?

YES NO

2. Was it professionally presented?

YES NO

3. Did you learn about developmental kindergarten classroom activities?

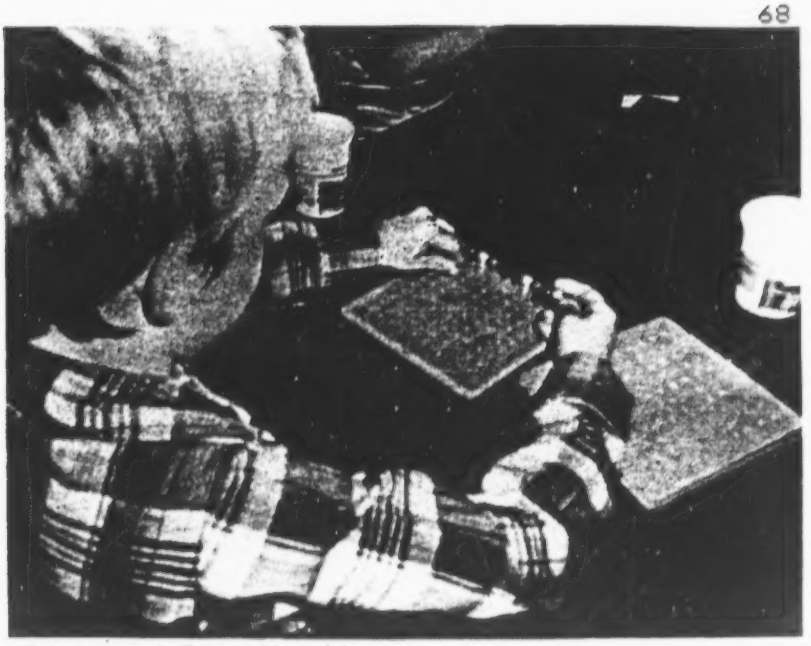
YES NO

4. Were some of your questions answered regarding developmental placement?

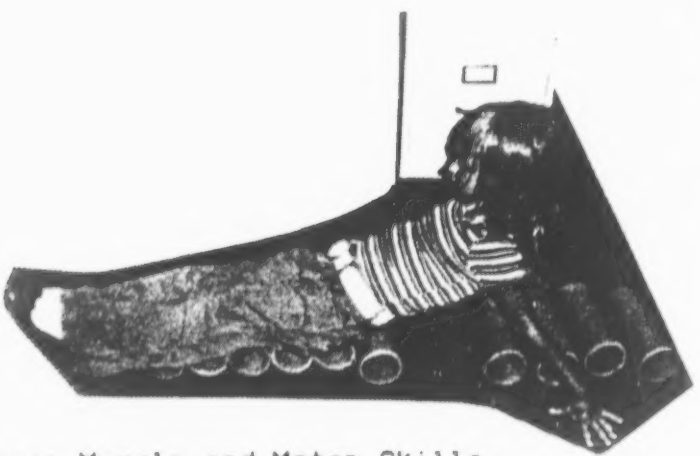
YES NO NO QUESTIONS

APPENDIX D

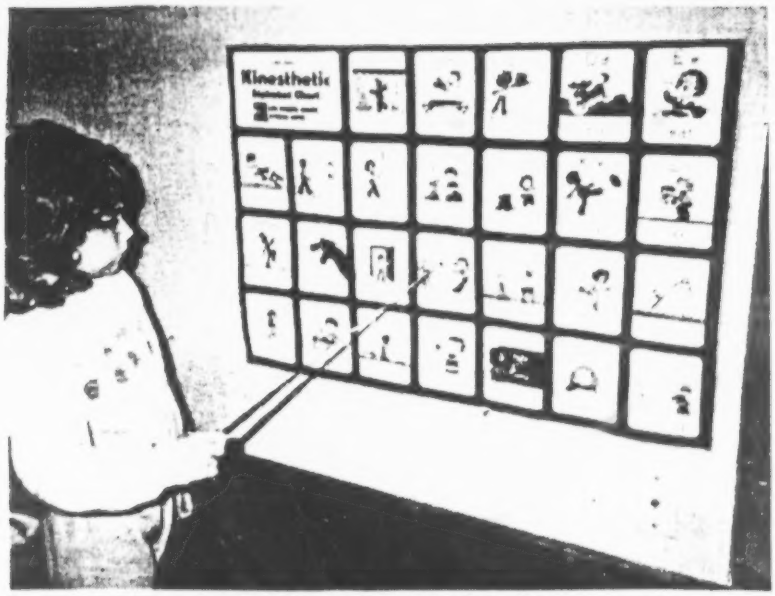
SAMPLE PHOTOS



Eye-hand Coordination.



Large Muscle and Motor Skills.



Sequencing and Left to Right Progression

Following Directions, Body Parts, and Exercise

Small Motor Manipulation Skills

Auditory Reception and Following Directions

Visual Perception

How People Live in Various Communities

Family Relationships and Social Awareness

Readiness Puzzle-The Missing Piece, a Consideration of All of the Other Pieces, is Developmental Age

ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS

HERE ARE SOME COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTAL PLACEMENT PROGRAMS

APPENDIX E

VIEWER HANDOUT

Q: What is meant by "school readiness"?
A: School readiness is the ability to cope with school, phsyically, emotionally, socially, academically, and intellectually, without excessive stress.

Q: Can we speed the child's maturation?
A: No. The biological time clock that control's a child's developmental maturation cannot be altered. We can help the child by accepting, nurturing, and placing him/her in the proper developmental setting.

Q: How is the "developmental age" determined?
A: The Gesell School Readiness Test is administered and evaluated by a trained developmental examiner.

Q: What does the test measure?
A: The test shows the child's problem solving style, how the child's mind and body work together, whether or not the child can accomplish abstract tasks, and it demonstrates the child's ability to communicate.

Q: Is the test reliable?
A: The test was developed following several years of research and observations of hundreds of children, and it has been evaluated and refined. Results of research using the test as an indicator of school success have been positive.

Q: If a child has been in day care previous to kindergarten, shouldn't that child be mature?
A: Experience has shown that while day care is sometimes valuable, frequently fun, and for many parents, necessary; it does not increase developmental maturity in children who attend.

Q: What are some signs that a child may be overplaced?
A: Continuous colds or other chronic illnesses such as upset stomach or headache, lethargy, excessive crying spells, irritability, toileting accidents, claims that the work is too hard (often accompanied by self-deprecating remarks; "I'm dumb", "I can't do that stuff"), having to be forced to go to school, and constant behavior problems while in school are some of the signs of overplacement.

DO YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTONS

PLEASE ASK THE BUILDING ADMINISTRATOR OR PRIMARY SPECIALIST FOR ASSISTANCE

APPENDIX F

PARENT PHOTO-USE PERMISSION LETTER

Dear Parents:

A program is being planned to share with parents and teachers various aspects of the developmental classroom.

Slides and photographs will be used showing various activities throughout the school day with concentration on learning through play.

Please indicate below your permission to use photos/slides of your child for the purposes described above.

_____

Parent/Guardian

Thank you,

_____

Kindergarten Teacher

APPENDIX G

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

DATE	ATTENDANCE	AUDIENCE
8-23-85	43	Public School Teachers
8-29-85	84	Public School Parents
9-12-85	76	Public School Parents
9-24-85	18	Public School Parents
9-24-85	15	Public School Teachers Inservice
9-26-85	40	Public School Teachers
10-05-85	17	Public School Teachers
11-06-85	15	Future Teachers Inservice
1-24-86	61	Public School Teachers Inservice
3-11-86	33	Preschool Teachers Inservice
3-17-86	2	Public School Teachers Inservice
3-24-86	5	Public School Teachers Inservice
5-21-86	16	Preschool Parents
5-22-86	11	Preschool Parents
5-28-86	14	Preschool Parents